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NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 1972

NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1972 VOLUME VIII NO. 7

THAMES SCIENCE CENTER, INC.
GALLOWS LANE
NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT 06320

FRONT COVER:

QUIET PEACE:
THE ARBORETUM POND

Photo by Patsy Highberg

CONTENTS:

Nature Jaunt to Your Outdoor Market 1
Dance of the Prometheas 6
The Last Migrant 8
All That Glistens Is Not Gold 10
Daddy Longlegs 12
Notes from Here and There .. 13
Field Notes 15
A Trout To Color ..... Inside Back Cover

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NATURE JAUNT TO YOUR OUTDOOR MARKET

Text by Stephan Syz
Illustrations by Shelley White

Midsummer and early fall are among the very best times of the year to gather edible wild foods. This month try some of these summer plants and recipes. But please remember one food gathering rule: ONLY EAT A PLANT WHICH YOU CAN IDENTIFY WITH CERTAINTY.

August is berry time for birds and people. Blackberries, huckleberries, raspberries, high- and low-bush blueberries, and wineberries are all available for pies, jellies, and your fruit bowl.

Huckleberry

Berry Pies: Line a pie plate with oil pastry and fill with berries. Combine 1 cup sugar and ¼ cup flour with a bit of salt, sprinkle over berries, and add bits of butter. Put on top crust, slash, and bake 45 minutes at 400 F. Serve while still warm. (For drier berries, add less flour and for moister ones, add a bit more.)

Watch especially along roads for the delicious wineberry with the soft red, sticky, raspberry-like berries and many hairlike thorns.

Single Wineberry

Wineberry

Elderberry

Elderberry Fritters, etc.: Nothing beats elderberry fritters! Collect the white umbels of flowers, and after removing the coarse stems, dip in batter made of 1 cup flower, 1 tablespoon sugar, 1 teaspoon baking powder, 2 eggs, and ½ cup milk. Fry the dipped clusters in vegetable oil for about 4 minutes until brown. Put on a paper towel and squeeze orange juice over them. Roll in granulated sugar and serve hot.

Later in the fall the flowers you missed will become berries. Eat these right off the bush by the cluster, or collect enough for a pie (it won't take long).

Jewelweed

Antidote to Poison Ivy: While you are searching for wild foods, you may accidentally get into poison ivy. In swampy places you will frequently find the succulent touch-me-not or jewelweed. Crush up a handful of the stems and leaves of this plant and rub on the exposed skin. This is supposed to neutralize the poison. I have used it against poison ivy and poison sumac with great success.

Milkweed

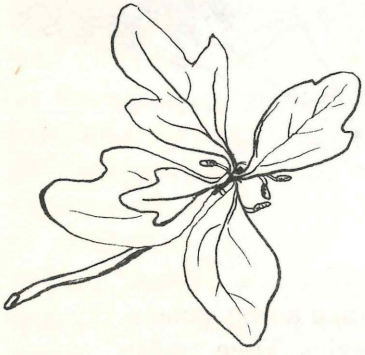
Common Milkweed Vegetables: Three parts of the milkweed can be eaten. The young shoot has already gone by, and it is now time for the unopened flowers and later the young hard seed pods (up to 2 inches long). Both of these are prepared in the same way. Cover with water and boil for 1 minute thrice. Then boil for 10 minutes. Drain, butter, salt, and SERVE!

Milkweed pod

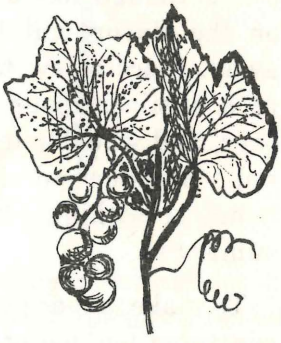
Sassafras leaves can make any grilled steak taste fantastic. Just place the leaves on your sizzling steak.

Bayberry leaves can add a lift to hamburgers. Collect some leaves, dry, and sprinkle on ground meat when preparing hamburgers.

Grape leaves may be stuffed with a mixture of cooked rice, hamburger meat, and seasoning, baked, and served.



Sassafras



Grape

Sorrel

Sheep Sorrel Soup: (an all-summer favorite from a garden weed): Coarsely chop 2 cups of washed leaves. Stir them with 1 tablespoon melted butter over heat until they darken. Add one chopped raw potato and a chicken bouillon cube along with 3 cups of water and some salt. Simmer 30 minutes, puree, and add to a thin cream sauce made of 1 tablespoon butter, 1 tablespoon flour, and 1 to 1½ cups milk. Serve hot with breadsticks.

Sumac

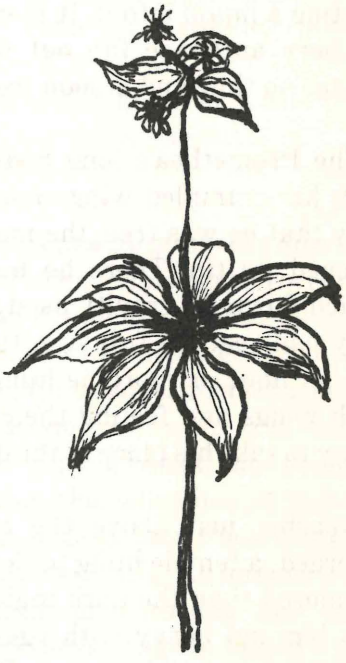
Sumac Tea and Syrup: The sumac bush produces a tall spire-like cluster of red flowers and fruits. The staghorn sumac with its furry branches is best as a wild food. Strip the red berries from the stem and let them dry. For best results, collect them before a heavy rain or the flavor will be washed away. Place a few tablespoons in a strainer, pour hot water over, and wait for it to become red. Sweeten to taste with honey. Nothing beats this sumac tea.

To make sumac syrup for pancakes, make a very concentrated tea, using over a cupful of berries. Then add sugar to the simmering tea until it is a thick syrup.

Day Lily: Gather unopened buds when almost full grown, boil for a few minutes, butter, and salt.

Day Lily

Indian Cucumber Root: Dig the tasty roots of this plant for a refreshment in the woods.



Indian Cucumber Root

These should get you started this fall. You can gain momentum in learning and preparing wild foods by buying some of the many books on the subject.

DANCE OF THE PROMETHEAS

by Kathie Y. Haeni

As the crimson sky faded to a greenish-blue and the first star of the evening appeared, a big moth fluttered among the trees. Another joined it, then another, and another, until the darkening sky seemed filled with aimless flyers. They dipped under low branches, swept across the meadow grass, and swirled high over the treetops. It was the spring dance of the Prometheas, the male moths in search of a mate. They were answering the age-old call of a female waiting somewhere close by.

Wild cherry trees grow along an old stone wall. Hanging from a few are dried leaves, but these are not ordinary leaves. Each leaf is tied securely to a twig with silken threads, and it is rolled up to hide the cocoon of a Promethea moth. In late spring, the tops of the cocoons spread open. The moth makes the top of the cocoon soft by ejecting a liquid into it. It then pushes its head through. A pair of big feathery antennae fan out to show this to be a male. The moth wastes no time and is soon free of its home.

The Promethea's long body looks much like a furry caterpillar, with his crumpled wings hanging down like a wad of soft flannel. Now that he was free, the moth backed down the dead leaf until he reached its tip. There he hung while the wings slowly unfurled, pulled down by gravity as strength flowed into them. When at last they had reached full size, the moth's body had shrunk to normal. For an hour or more he hung there, lazily opening and closing his dark wings and feeling their new stiffness. By dusk the male was ready to take his place in the dance of the Prometheas.

Nearby, just above the cocoon from which she had recently emerged, a female hung patiently from a twig. She was more brightly colored than the dark male and had smaller antennae. Her body was big and heavy with eggs. Now she sent out her call, an odor which is irresistible to male Prometheas. It was so far-reaching that they answered from far places a mile or more downwind. They came by scores to join in the dance, to seek out the place where she waited. At last one found her and fluttered down on the twig by her side. The hunt was over.

The life of a Promethea is short. After mating, the female flies heavily through the low growth, laying her eggs on cherry, sassafras, spicebush, and other leaves, a few here and a few there. Each egg is fastened tight with sticky, reddish glue. In a few days her fat, swollen body is greatly shrunken. None of these giant moths has mouth parts, so when they use up the energy they bring from the cocoon, there is no way to replenish it. Having done their part to perpetuate their kind, they are exhausted. Their battered wings no longer have strength to carry them, and they drop to the floor of the woods to die.

The warmth of the sun reaches inside the round eggs, and in a dozen days they are ready to hatch. An opening appeared in one. It grew larger, and then a small black head appeared, followed by a yellow and black body as the first caterpillar wriggled out into a leaf. The caterpillars grow fast, and soon their skins become too tight and uncomfortable. Four days after hatching, they are ready to shed their skins. The skin splits in the back of each one's head and the silkworm wriggles it down over its body. Four times the caterpillars change their coats, until at last they are full grown. Now they are more than two inches long with smooth bluish-green skin and rows of shiny black dots in blue circles decorating them like buttons.

Six weeks after hatching, the caterpillars stop eating forever. After resting for a few hours, they set to work fashioning a cocoon in which they will change into moths. The Promethea knows nothing about the change of the seasons. Yet it moves up onto a leaf stem and wraps it around and around with silk. It then moves to a twig above and throws countless strands around that too, tying the leaf so fast that even the strongest blast of winter wind will not tear it loose. The finished cocoon is much smaller than the caterpillar who built it. So much liquid is used in the building of the cocoon that the caterpillar's body shrinks to less than one-half of its original size. Several days go by before the caterpillar again goes through a transformation. This is a change to a pupa, the third stage in the life cycle of all moths, butterflies, and many other insects.

While winter winds whistle through the trees, the pupae wait for the call of spring to join in the mating dance of the Prometheas.

THE LAST MIGRANT

Text by Frank R. Haeni
Illustration by Tony De Gange

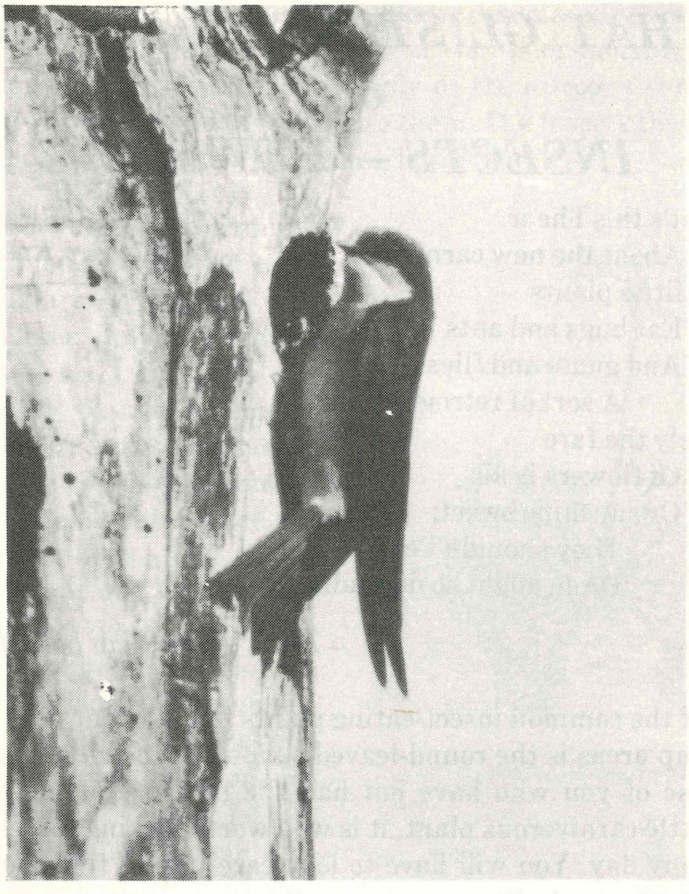
The tree swallow, *Iridoprocne bicolor*, is the first of the swallows to arrive from the south in the spring and the last to leave again in the fall. It is a hardy species of bird. Many individuals spend winter in the southern part of the United States and hence have comparatively short migration to their summer homes along the northeast shores. As the birds arrive in late March, they may encounter frost and snow. Under such conditions, the birds may retreat to the south again until spring comes northward again.

Before North America was settled, the tree swallow built its nests in hollow trees. However, with civilization of the wilderness by man, the birds quickly appropriated as nesting sites the houses that our ancestors put up to accommodate the tree swallow's close cousin, the purple martin. Both Wilson and Audubon make frequent mention of this habit.

Presently the birds build their nests in old apple orchards and in holes in trees, especially when they stand in open ground near meadows or bodies of water. Nesting boxes placed at strategic locations along the edges of marshes or freshwater ponds will be certain to be used by tree swallows.

Observations on banded tree swallows show that a pair may breed together in successive seasons.The nest consists of an accumulation of dry grass and straw, hollowed out and lined with feathers. The nest usually contains four to six pure white unmarked eggs, and more than that number would usually be the product of two females. While the female takes care of all the incubation, the male does bring food to her while on the nest. Later both actively feed the young.

The diet consists of flies, beetles, ants, and various kinds of bees and wasps, while the plant portion consists almost entirely of bayberry. Feeding tree swallows are in a similar niche to the flycatchers. Flying over meadows, ponds, and rivers, they veer from side to side, snatching up insects as they overtake them or meet them in the air. Their aerial acrobatics are interesting to watch as they dip and soar.



The voice of the tree swallow is of a pleasing, gentle quality. The call, a *SILIP*, is a rapidly pronounced note, sometimes rippled into three or more syllables. Francis Allen referred to the tree swallow as "one of the very earliest singers in the morning concert." Of the song, he says, "It is really a remarkable performance regarded as an exhibition of endurance."

Fall is a season of drama in the tree swallow's yearly cycle. Thousands of swallows congregate along telephone wires up and down the Atlantic Coast getting ready for the fall migration. The birds can be seen flying over open meadows and along stream banks picking up insects or along the beaches eating bayberries.

For some very exciting bird watching this fall, observe the migration of these majestic birds.

ALL THAT GLISTENS IS NOT GOLD
or
INSECTS — BEWARE!

Text and Illustrations
by Barbara Kashanski

What's this I hear
About the new carnivora?
Can little plants
Eat bugs and ants
And gnats and flies?
A sort of retrograding:
Surely the fare
Of flowers is air
Or sunshine sweet;
They shouldn't eat,
Or do aught so degrading.

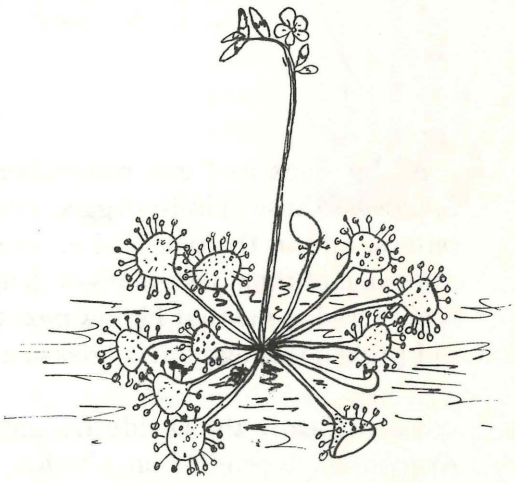
—From a Victorian botanical book

One of the common insect-eating plants found in our bogs or other acid damp areas is the round-leaved sundew *(Drosera rotundifolia).* For those of you who have not had the pleasure of meeting this lovely little carniverous plant, it is well worth looking for, especially on a sunny day. You will have to look carefully to find these small low-growing plants. The round-shaped leaves grow in a rosette close to the ground and are covered with reddish glandular hairs tipped with small sticky drops of juice that shine in the sun like dewdrops.

Actually, the genus name *Drosera* is derived from the Greek word for *dew* and refers to the sparkling drops found at the end of the hairs. Any foolhardy insect that is attracted to these glistening leaves is immediately caught fast by the innocent-looking clear drops that are stickier than honey. Touch one and feel for yourself! Once caught, the hapless victim has little chance for escape, as the reddish hairs, stimulated by the struggle of the captive, bend around the prey like tentacles until the insect is completely imprisoned. A digestive material is then exuded by the glands which breaks down the insect's body until the plant can absorb the food from it. Chemical analysis has shown that the complex fluid secreted by the sundew is very similar to the gastric juices found in the stomach of animals.

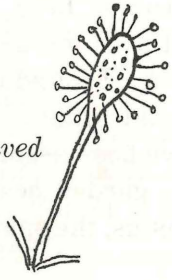
Why should a plant eat insects when it can manufacture its own food? Most insect-eating plants grow in very poor moist soil or wet acidic places where a sufficient supply of the nitrogen compounds, especially nitrates, is not available to them. The insects they capture and digest help provide these missing ingredients.

The flowers of the round-leaved sundew are pink or white and are formed in a one-sided cluster at the top of a stalk that rises up from the center of the plant. The flowers open one at a time and only when it is sunny. Blooming time is the end of June and the first part of July.



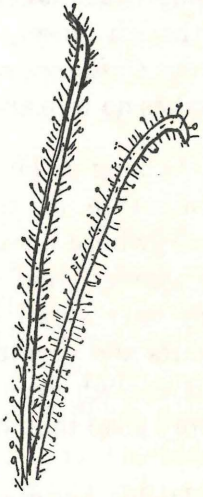
round-leaved sundew

The other types of sundew that can be found in this area are the thread-leaved sundew *(D. filiformis)*, which has its sticky glandular hairs on upright narrow stringlike leaves, and the spatulate-leaved sundew *(D. intermedia)*, which has leaves similar in shape to a wooden stirring spoon or spatula.



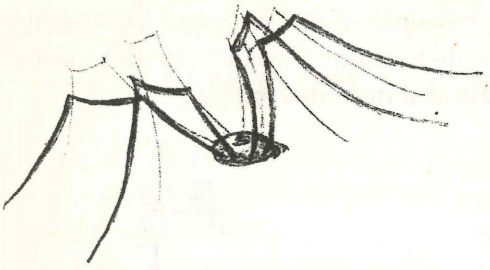
leaf of spatulate-leaved sundew

leaves of thread-leaved sundew



For the extra curious, it is fun to bring home one of these small carnivorous plants, feed it small insects, and watch the plant in action. Collecting should only be done where there is an abundant supply; and if the novelty of keeping the sundew wears off, the plant should be returned to the same area from which it came.

DADDY LONGLEGS



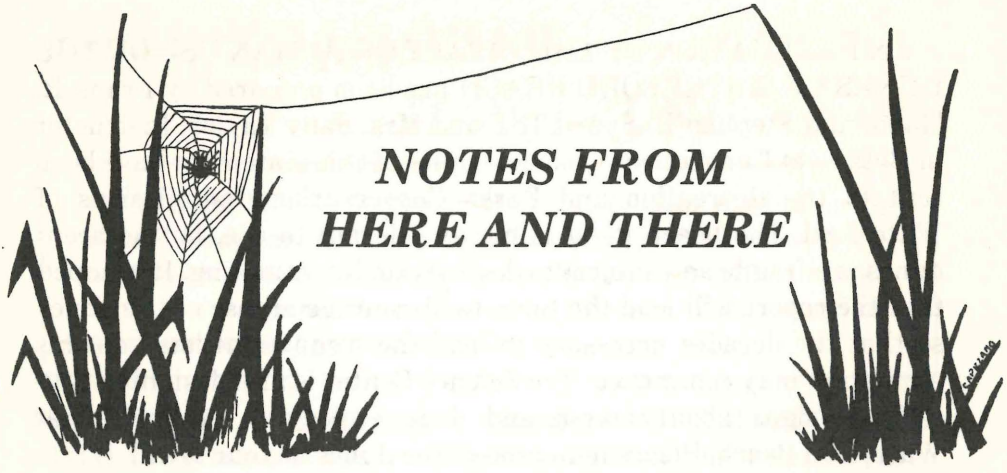
Text and Illustration
by Ruth M. Ritter

As far back as I can remember, I've been fascinated by Daddy Longlegs, those spindly-legged creatures found in woodpiles, damp cellars, and in the woods. For some reason there was a population explosion of them last year—at least in our house, yard, and garden. It occurred to me that I know next to nothing about Daddy Longlegs, so I probed through a few books and became quite enthralled.

Scientifically the Daddy Longlegs is either of the class *Insecta* or *Arachnida*, depending on whether you are English or American. The English use the nickname interchangeably with *cranefly*, an insect which looks like an overgrown mosquito, while Americans mean the spider-like *harvestman*, which is an arachnid. Spider-*like*? Yes; although closely related to spiders, the Daddy Longlegs is of the order *Opiliones* rather than *Araneae* to which the spiders belong. He makes no web and has no poison, as do spiders.

As long as he can find a damp spot, Daddy Longlegs can live in temperate or tropical climates. Around here I've found them everywhere imaginable (including all over my garden), causing me to wonder what they eat. To my dismay, I found that they consume not only small invertebrates and dead animal material but also fruits and vegetables. However, I have been assured that they don't eat enough even to approach being a garden pest and probably do more good than harm — like their cousins, the spiders.

Daddy Longlegs, in spite of the name, sometimes turns out to be female, and after mating lays hundreds of eggs at a time in moss or decaying material. Eggs hatch in the spring, usually, and often the mature animal dies in the cold weather of the fall, having lived less than a year. But if one winters over in your cellar, tolerate him — he can't hurt you and may prove beneficial.



NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE

TSC PRESIDENT DR. ROBERT S. DE SANTO, founder and past Director of the Summer Marine Science Program and Assistant Professor of Zoology at Connecticut College, has left the college to be Chief Environmental Scientist for C.E. MaGuire, Inc., and this summer he will be teaching a course on man and his environment at the Summer Institute for Teachers at Wesleyan University.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SECOND ANNUAL GIVING PROGRAM continue to help the Center grow. The most recent gifts are as follows: In memory of Mr. and Mrs. Charles T. Hazlewood, $1,000 was presented to the Center by Miss Margaret Hazlewood. A grant of $625 for "general use" was given by the James P. and Mary E. Shea Perpetual Fund. From the estate of Marenda Holmes Sherman, $4,400 was bequeathed to the Center. Our good friends in the Lyme Consolidated School, the S.O.S. Pollution Club of grade 7, arrived for a "thank you" field trip and bird banding demonstration by the Center Staff, only to present a check for $150. This was later followed by a check for $50 sent by a group of the Lyme Consolidated School staff calling themselves the "Anti-Pollutionaires." As always, the Science Center is deeply grateful for this demonstration of community support.

A SCHEMATIC DESCRIPTION OF OUR WEATHER STATION was designed, executed, and presented to the Science Center by Susan Thornton, a graduate student at the School of Art and Architecture of Yale University. This clear and well-designed gift at long last helps to illustrate how the station works in easily understood words and drawings.

AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF HUMAN USE ON THE DUNES OF WATERFORD BEACH has been prepared by Frank R. Haeni and Stephan B. Syz of TSC and Mrs. Sally Taylor, Instructor in Botany at Connecticut College. Copies of this statement have been sent to the Recreation and Parks Conservation Commissions of Waterford. The beach itself is highly tolerant to use, but adjacent dunes are fragile and subject to destruction by trampling. It is hoped that the report will lead the town to discourage all use of the dunes so that the decades necessary to heal the wounds inflicted on this ecosystem may commence. The Science Center is also designing educational signs about marsh and dune ecology to be erected at Waterford Beach. Please help protect the dunes in your town!

THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE STUDY DAY CAMP has started off well with such activities as bird banding demonstrations in the Peace Sanctuary Nature Preserve in Mystic. The second two-week session to be held in the Connecticut Arboretum is completely full, but there are a few openings left in Session III (Lyme) and Session IV (Waterford). For additional brochures or information, please telephone the Center at 442-0391.

"EXPLORING OUR NATURAL WORLD THROUGH MAPS" is the theme of our display in the museum wing of the Science Center. Under the energetic and imaginative direction of our Curator, Shelley White, various maps of southeastern Connecticut have been gathered for display. Dr. Richard H. Goodwin, Dr. William Niering, and Dr. Bernice Wheeler of Connecticut College, Stephan B. Syz of TSC, Mrs. Lucille Showalter (New London historian), L. L. Davis of Pequot Outing Club, and William Neff of Indian Trails Council of the Boy Scouts of America have all contributed explanations concerning everything from geological formation and trails to historical accounts and the location of nature preserves. Come and take a look; it is fascinating and fun.

FIELD NOTES—
MAY 1-JUNE 30, 1972

CONTRIBUTORS: Please send or call in your field notes to Frank Haeni at the Center by the last day of the month. We are planning to publish reports by the calendar month rather than the staggered dates formerly followed. This should be more convenient for future reference.

New London, Waterford, Niantic: A RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH was seen at Lake Konomoc in Waterford May 6. Three INDIGO BUNTINGS were seen in a flock of GOLDFINCHES feeding on the lawn at Seaside in Waterford May 7. The following were seen in Quaker Hill May 7: a SCARLET TANAGER, PALM WARBLER, and YELLOW WARBLER; two EASTERN KINGBIRDS, and fifteen MYRTLE WARBLERS. Also seen on that day were a SOLITARY VIREO and HOUSE WREN in Mitchell Woods in New London. A GLOSSY IBIS was observed at Harkness Park May 8 and 14: Other birds at Harkness of May 14 included all six species of SWALLOWS, a GRASSHOPPER SPARROW, and WILLET. An unusual ALBINO GRACKLE was noted along Fog Plain Road in Waterford May 11 and 12. Fourteen CEDAR WAX-WINGS were in Niantic May 17. WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS were last heard singing on May 18 in this area. Birding May 21 produced a YELLOW-THROATED VIREO in Mitchell Woods. A late BUFFLEHEAD was seen May 28 in Waterford. Seven DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANTS were observed at Lake Konomoc June 2. Also on the 2nd at Harkness Park, birders found a SNOWY EGRET. Forty-seven nesting burrows of BANK SWALLOWS were found at the corner of Route 85 and Lake's Pond Road. A TRAILL'S FLY-CATCHER was seen in Waterford June 3 and in Harkness Park June 12. Other Waterford observations include five CATTLE EGRETS seen on June 4. A rare ACADIAN FLYCATCHER was found in Devil's Hopyard Park on June 11, where a BROWN CREEPER was also seen on the same day. Birding at Harkness Park on June 11 also produced a CATTLE EGRET there. June 12 at Harkness gave birders the pleasure of seeing ROSEATE TERNS. Other Harkness observations include a GADWALL seen June 25. At the Arboretum an INDIGO BUNTING and a BROAD-WINGED HAWK were observed June 26.

Groton, Mystic, Stonington: Three LITTLE BLUE HERONS were found at Barn Island May 14. Four PINE SISKINS and an EVENING GROSBEAK stayed in Stonington until May 17. Another rare ACADIAN FLYCATCHER was seen on the Pequot Trail in Stonington May 14 and was still there until June 3. On May 19 a RED FOX was spotted in wooded thickets at the Haley Farm. ARETHUSA and ROSE POGONIA were flowering in the bog there and BROAD- AND NARROW-LEAF IRIS were blooming next to the salt marsh. Birders were overwhelmed when they found an AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER in Mumford Cove, Groton, on June 10. Twenty SNOWY EGRETS were seen after a rainstorm in Stonington June 21. A RED-BREASTED MERGANSER was found at Barn Island June 26. At the Haley Farm on June 27 a FOWLER'S TOAD was noted. The GREY TREE FROGS are singing busily in the evenings there. A pair of breeding GRASSHOPPER SPARROWS were observed here over a four-week period.

Rhode Island Shoreline: Birding at Napatree Point May 14 produced 100 BRANT, 15 ROSEATE TERNS, and 6 PURPLE SANDPIPERS. On June 28, a WHIMBREL and 25 PIPING PLOVERS were counted.

Contributors: G. Bissell, Mrs. J. Britt, B. Dassinger, T. De Gange, H. Gilman, F. Haeni, Mrs. C. Klipp, M. Laffarge, Mrs. Lombardino, J. Merrill, Mr. & Mrs. M. Patterson, S. Syz.

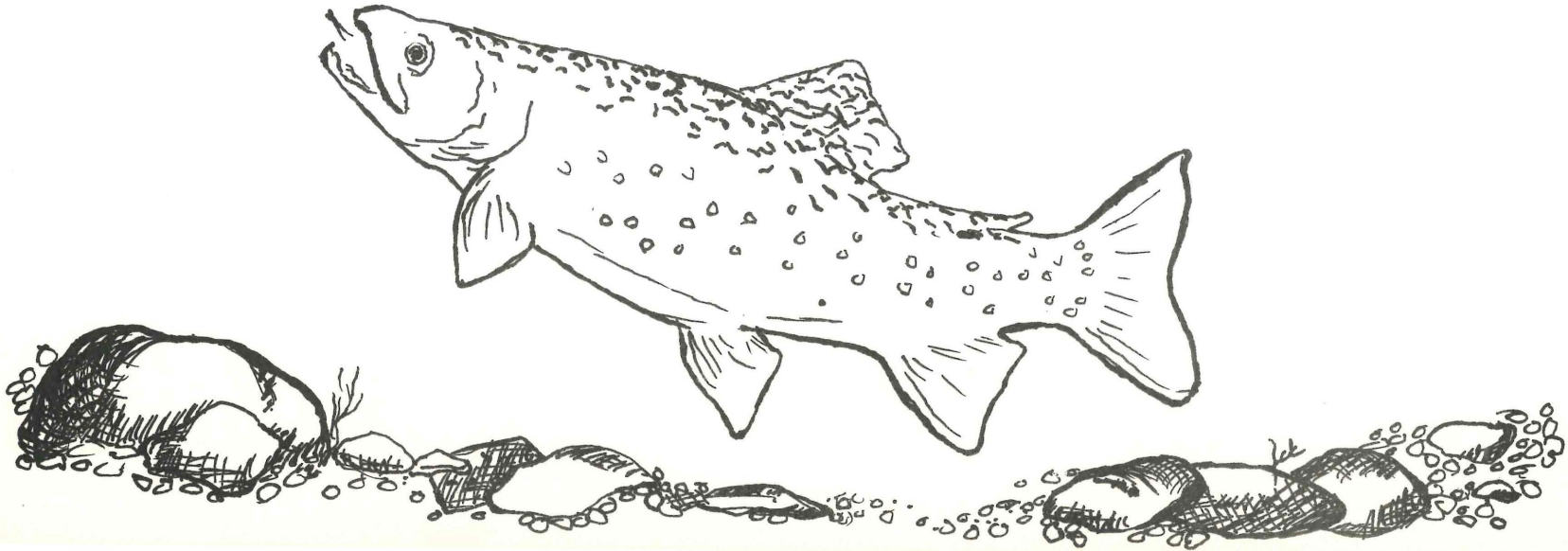
WATCH THE MONTHLY ACTIVITY CALENDARS FOR BIRD WALKS, COURSES, AND BIRD BANDING PROGRAMS THIS FALL.

Did you know that a hummingbird becomes almost dormant at night? His body temperature drops from a daytime level of 112 F. to that of the night air. Although he weighs little more than a marshmallow, he must gather about a cup of nectar a day to meet his high-energy requirements. He eats small insects as well as nectar . . . think about his problems if you spray a pesticide indiscriminately over your flower garden.

—from *Trailblazer*, a publication of
Connecticut Trails Council of Girl Scouts

Color this Brook Trout with its worm-like markings on its back green-brown, shading into olive green on its sides. The spots are red and white and the fins are orange-red with a black and white stripe.

He feeds on minnows, nymphs, and bugs in lakes and streams.



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